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Publish and be damned: New media publics and neoliberal risk

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Abstract
The public sphere is increasingly being depicted as a site of inadequately assessed risk when American undergraduates post blogs, videos, and Facebook updates that become viral, prompting others to mutter 'don't they know better than to press send?' In this article, I offer an analytical frame for such posting that does not re-inscribe US tendencies to attribute ignorance or misguided selfishness to unwelcome behavior. In the United States, there are multiple and mutually defining understandings of how publics are constituted. Historically, these ideas often change when Americans respond to the ways new technologies alter how communication is made public or private. This is an ethnographic account of one way that multiple publics are seen to co-exist uneasily as people negotiate the newness of new media. Grounded in my ethnographic research, I explore how cautionary stories about 'pressing send' reflect neoliberal concerns about allocating risk and responsibility among individual choice-makers.

Keywords
public sphere, risk, neoliberalism, publics, United States, anonymity, new media, public vs. private, access

In October 2010, a story circulated in the US media about an email mishap. Karen Owens, a Duke undergraduate, sent an email with a PowerPoint attachment to a handful of her friends. The attachment was a parody of an honors thesis, in which Owens compared the male undergraduates she had slept with while at Duke, many of them athletes. Her friends, amused, forwarded the document to their friends. Soon the parody went viral, the recirculation fueled partially by recent memories of Duke athletes being charged and then acquitted of rape. It was the wildfire spread that captured the media's attention, yet another captivatingly familiar cautionary tale about how 'The Youth' don't properly think through the risks of 'pressing

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send'. Deborah Hastings, a journalist, described Karen Owens' misadventures as naïveté about the dangers of accidently entering the public sphere: 'It's Internet 101: Don't e-mail while drunk, sex-texting is never private and everything on the Internet never really dies. Before you hit that send button, remember you can't take it back. But it appears people still don't get it.' Her comments reveal a common set of assumptions circulating in the United States that everyone's private communication is a misstep away from entering the risk-laden public sphere when they incautiously use the wrong medium. And for commentators like Hastings, other people, especially young people, are never mindful enough of the risks.

A US neoliberal conception of subjectivity shapes why these narratives of the risks of new media are so compelling nowadays. In part, this has to do with changing perceptions of the public sphere, which Tocqueville (1838) and Habermas (1962) theorized as an arena of political exploration essential for democracy. For many living in the United States, the public sphere is increasingly being seen as a sphere of risks, of virality, at the same time as these Americans' understandings of technological structures often make what counts as public speech ambiguous and under redefinition. While at any moment there are many different historically and culturally specific perspectives on how publics are constituted, two distinct and mutually constitutive visions of publics are at play when the US public sphere is perceived as risk-laden thusly. My argument focuses not on the nature of the public sphere (a more Habermasian kind of project) but rather on how people think about the public sphere (Warner, 2002).[1]

There is an increasingly popular discourse in the United States framing the public sphere and public speech in terms of risk and individual responsibility because of two conceptual shifts. First, there are now two widespread incompatible yet mutually constitutive conceptions of publics. There is a public described by Michael Warner as comprised of anonymous strangers that exists alongside a public comprised of people intentionally given access to and enacting (or refusing to act upon) their access to a public. In the process, the imagined anonymous public sphere becomes re-defined through contrast with publics structured around accessibility. Second, neoliberal logics in the United States require a subjectivity that disciplines one into evaluating all acts in terms of risk, reward, and responsibility, including speech acts.[2] This is an extension of a fundamental shift in the capitalist metaphors that structure the US neoliberal self. The classic liberal capitalist self no longer holds sway, in which one owned oneself as though the self were property. Under this neoliberal logic, one owns oneself as though the self were a business, entering into alliances metaphorically with other businesses while constantly negotiating the risks and responsibilities of these alliances.

Building on these insights, I have sought to unpack through interviews how people's own analysis of publics shapes their engagements with publics. In the following, I first discuss the vantage-point my ethnographic research offers on changing notions of public speech. I then interweave arguments I have made elsewhere about an emerging notion of publics structured along notions of access (Gershon, 2010: ch. 5) and the contours of neoliberal subjectivity

(Gershon, 2011a). I also discuss how this conception of the public sphere as a site of neoliberal risk humanizes contemporary risks in public speech by foregrounding individual agency and drawing attention away from corporate and government surveillance.

The ever-elusive neoliberal digital native

When I first read about Owens' Powerpoint sex thesis, I felt a wave of resignation – Americans' anxieties about new media were re-surfacing yet again in what has become for me an increasingly familiar narrative. I often encounter these anxieties because of my research on how Americans use new media to break up with each other. What are some standard elements of this narrative? A young person says something inappropriate, often sexually explicit or racist, because that person does not understand the potential publicness of a speech act, or how publics are organized. This goes viral, largely because of other young people initially. The media and blog spheres then circulate a news story based primarily on the very fact of the story's virality. In commenting on how widespread the story is, there is another flurry of criticism within media circles about how young people these days don't understand a putatively universal aspect of public speech, that one has no control over who has access to one's words.

This is a narrative structure that illustrates one way in which Americans are responding to the 'newness' of new media, and thus creating cultural meaning around the concept of 'newness.' This point is crucial for an ethnographic argument that takes 'newness' not as a pre-given category but as a socially constructed quality (see Sturken et al., 2004). Americans historically have responded to new media as 'new' by being troubled by its isolating effects or by rejoicing in its potential for new connections. Americans often portray vulnerable groups as dupes of this newness: women, children, and poor immigrants are predominantly among those said to be easily led astray by the hazards inherent to a specific new medium (see Marvin, 1988; Bauman, 2010). Today, in various US media stories or American daily conversations, young people are singled out as digital natives or particularly foolish new media users, or both. Deploying generational difference to comment on newness has been historically a well-rehearsed strategy. However, there are elements of this narrative that are specific to the contemporary moment – the neoliberal-inflected conceptualization of both the public/private boundary and the public sphere.

Two aspects of this common narrative structure stand out to the ethnographer. First, there is the concept of a generation, or a generational divide. And second, there are the familiar tropes of neoliberal risk. The concept of generation is performing significant explanatory work; it is a convenient shorthand for people as they reflect on social change (see Liechty, 1995; Petersen, 1976; Suslak, 2009). In the instances I consider, generation is pointing to a mixture of innocence and technological sophistication. On the one hand, young people are supposedly comfortable using a wide range of relatively new technologies. On the other hand,

they repeatedly make social blunders based on their willingness to use these technologies. They putatively do not comprehend the consequences of public speech, a misapprehension explained through the broad brushstrokes of 'generation'.

Other scholars have pointed to how inadequate the generational divide is as an explanation for heterogeneous practices. Livingstone contends that the stereotype of the digital native does not map onto how children in fact use the internet during different stages of childhood and adolescence (Livingstone, 2009). Gray's ethnography (2009) shows that digital access and use is strongly shaped by geography, sexual identity, and class, perhaps as much as or more than it is by generation. Often generational explanations can overlook substantive class divides.

There is another familiar pattern to notice: how these stories allocate responsibility. This is a framing that ethnographic critics of neoliberalism regularly find deeply suspect (see Rankin, 2004; Greenhouse, 2009). The sender of the message is always maximally responsible for 'pushing send'. Other actors are absolved – the designers of the technologies, the corporations distributing the technologies, and the people forwarding the message over and over again. Instead, the cautionary tale revolves around people who supposedly misunderstand the consequences of their actions.

The focus is on people's skills at imagining future scenarios, as Giddens (1990) and Beck (1992) have argued. These narratives about utterances circulating improperly are narratives in which agency is maximally attributed to careless people who would behave otherwise if only they knew better. As Papachrassi (2010) has pointed out, companies and governments are currently actively collecting massive data sets comprised of internet postings. Yet the risks assumed by thoughtless people pushing send are not the risks of privacy undone by corporations and governments, nor are they presented as violations of civil rights. These are ever-reassuring narratives of careless people circulating information that has the potential to be socially explosive – reassuring, because the narratives draw attention away from larger structural encroachments. What becomes risky is placed squarely on individual shoulders, a familiar neoliberal move.

What ethnography adds

While a critical textual analysis provides valuable insights when examining this often-repeated narrative structure about the hazards accompanying the newness of new media, ethnographic research can change one's perspective on the communicative practices that periodically erupt into such titillating narratives. My ethnographic research leads me to argue that Americans' conceptions of publics are in flux at the moment. Some people continue to think of publics in terms of anonymity while others begin to understand publics in terms of access, which is 'a combination of reachability and responsiveness' (Nippert-Eng, 2010: 160).

In 2007–8, I interviewed 72 people about how they were using new media to end relationships, both romantic relationships and friendships. Because I was studying break-ups, I only had access to data through interviews. No one in the middle of a

break-up conversation was likely to say: 'Wait a minute, is this a break-up conversation? I know a professor who really wants to study this. Can you hold on just a sec while I call her and see if she can get over here and take notes on our interaction?' I did collect some digitally produced texts about ending relationships, but for the most part my analysis has been based on interviews.[3] I used these interviews to provide insights into the stories people tell their friends and families, into their habits of speech, and into their media ideologies and their media practices.

Interviews provided me with insights into Americans' own social analysis of theirs' and others' new media practices. The people I interviewed were primarily undergraduates between the ages of 18 and 22 who attended my home institution, Indiana University. I would ask large lecture classes if anyone had a good story about break-ups and new media that they were willing to tell me. I also solicited interviews by emailing large university departments as well as identity-based organizations on campus, such as the Asian-American center. While initially I attempted snowball-sampling, this technique rarely proved successful for this project (it has been much more successful in my other ethnographic projects).

I was interviewing college students who were not in the same social circles, and who were trying to figure out how to end relationships, often, although not always, reluctantly. In my interviews, I found time and time again that people settled on how to behave by chatting with friends and family. They did not follow widely agreed upon social norms, indeed widespread etiquette often did not exist for specific situations. As a consequence, when those I interviewed use new media, they are encountering a multiplicity of practices, including different ways to speak in public as well as different ideas about what it means to speak in public.

People developed ideas of what were appropriate or inappropriate ways to use new media by asking about and observing the pockets of practice in which they dwell. Encountering this diversity in media practices is part of the way in which people experience technologies as 'new' nowadays: they are repeatedly analyzing a profusion of other people's non-standardized media practices (see Gershon, 2010). People would often respond to this range of practices with critique – in interviews they frequently described their strong sense that there was a right way to use new communicative technologies, and others should know better. Thus, while they might be surrounded by different ways of speaking in public, they would explain to me that some ways of speaking in public were clearly wrong, although those I interviewed differed in what they found acceptable.

This form of critique would come up in my interviews as critiques of other agemates' public speech. Undergraduates would frequently tell me that people their age did not understand the consequences of their public speech, invoking generational arguments. For example, Beth, a senior, said: 'Maybe I'm getting too old for Facebook . . . These young kids are doing all these crazy things on Facebook. I seriously feel like I just turned 40.' Beth is criticizing her own generation and positioning herself as removed from her own generation. She is also voicing the critique in the media stories I opened with, in which journalists

expressed shock and dismay about what young people are willing to say in public. Turning to generation as an overarching explanation helped to disguise the fact that Americans are concocting etiquette solutions in small groups informally when a specific problem about new media arises.

Seeing across publics

I want to use these ethnographically inspired points to focus on an aspect of publics that is generally in the margins of scholarly work on publics: what happens in the intersection between publics? In particular, I am interested in how new technologies have affordances that allow people to be quite conscious of the differences between types of publics, and the movements between them. Warner (2002) addresses the intersection between publics to a certain extent when he discusses how counterpublics experience their own limitations in contrast to hegemonic publics that do not present as radical poetic world-making alternatives. Yet here I am not discussing counterpublics, or the movement between publics as a tension between hegemonic practices and their alternatives. Richard Bauman and Patrick Feaster (2005) also suggest the possibility of multiple types of publics, delineating the different kinds of publics available and crucially revising Warner's account. They describe three differently constituted publics that were addressed when public oratory was first recorded during the decades after phonographs were introduced. Bauman and Feaster suggest that recordings included a public that was

> part of an assembled group of co-participants in a public event, public understood here in the sense of taking place in public space, openly accessible, on view, collectively enacted. Let us call this an *assembled* . . . or *gathered public*. Second, the phonograph's reiteration of the speech, and the recognition that it is a reiteration, invokes a *historically founded public*, made up of those who are heir to the legacy of the memorialized ancestors. And third, it invokes what we might call a *distributive public*, constituted by the dissemination of the text: those who have active or passive knowledge of it as a text and as a sign. (Bauman and Feaster, 2005: 40, emphasis in original)

While Bauman and Feaster usefully posit these different kinds of publics, they leave it for others to unpack how these publics intersect, and how people and texts move between these different types of publics. Building on these three scholars' work, I am analyzing what the public sphere looks like from the vantage point of a nascent, historically and culturally specific perspective on publics, one in which publics are defined by accessibility, especially when this shift occurs in the context of neoliberal logics.

There is a growing literature that takes neoliberalism to be offering new wine in old vessels. US neoliberal perspectives claim to rely on familiar concepts emerging from Enlightenment and liberal capitalist traditions, while in fact transforming their meanings and uses (see Greenhouse, 2010; Brown, 2006). Greenhouse points out, for example, that there is 'a marked tendency for neoliberal political

restructuring and resignification to borrow from older social forms – for example, borrowing the language of rights to sustain markets, citizens' forums to deflect social movements, public office for pursuit of private interests, and credit relationships as channels of social control' (Greenhouse, 2010: 4). As these top-down ideological shifts take hold, it is up to ethnographers to track how people on the ground are engaging with neoliberal frameworks in their daily lives. In the process, people on the ground are often obliged to mobilize other concepts, such as the public sphere, in directions that neoliberal thinkers such as Frederick Hayek and Milton Friedman might never have predicted. This larger recent literature on neoliberalism takes it to be the obligation of social analysts to critique these shifts (Brown, 2003, 2006; Gershon, 2011a; Greenhouse, 2010; Maurer, 1999; Mirowski and Plehwe, 2009; O'Malley, 1996).

My ethnographic research on break-ups offers me a certain vantage-point on this set of issues. I was not only interested in the conversation in which two people decided to break up, I was also tracing how people disentangled their mediated connections in a break-up's aftermath. The public sphere, if discussed, was being understood as a forum running parallel to the many (often medium-specific) publics with which my interviewees engaged. In addition, these publics were often described as more bounded than Michael Warner suggests, straddling the perceived public/private divide.

Technology and the public/private divide

When Americans express anxiety about messages turning viral, they are expressing concern about how new technologies allow speech acts to cross different types of publics without the author's consent, and thus a concern about 'newness'. Every new technology has a structure that alters knowledge circulation and thus affects how people can establish and re-establish what might be construed as a 'public' vs. 'private' divide. This is not to say that technological structures determine communication, but rather that there is a dialogic relationship between a technological structure and people's media ideologies and practices (see Gershon, 2010, 2011b). These technologies alter the types of metapragmatic information that accompanies every utterance.[4] When people reflect on these changes, which they do when discussing risky speech, they often frame these in terms of the 'newness' of these technologies.

My interviewees would comment on how certain technology gave them metapragmatic information for interpreting a message, often providing them insight into how the speaker was presupposing a different public/private divide than they found acceptable. Beth told me that she had been dumped by an email sent from her lover's Blackberry.

> Beth: And it was divided into subsections as to why it won't work out – A, B, and C. . . . And he decided to send me a very business-like email categorizing why it is not going to work. . . .

Ilana: He sent you an email?

Beth: Yeah, he sent me an email. It was fabulous. I could've killed him.

Ilana: Why did he choose an email? You had Skype, so he could have called you.

Beth: Oh yeah . . . He owned his own business, he is very fast-paced. Honestly, he probably sent it from his Blackberry. . . . I was totally in love with this guy, I was going to move to go to law school and you just sent me an A. B. C. break-up email, so I don't know . . . the fact that it can be sent from his handheld. Oh, I am going to ship an order, I am going to jump real quick to this meeting, I am going to break up with my girlfriend, hold on. This is not on your 'to-do' list, I am not a 'to-do' for today.

She was offended by the formality of the email, how it mimicked business memos. She was also hurt by the fact that he used his Blackberry to send her this message, in part because this was a device he used to manage so many of his professional contacts. Because every message originating on a Blackberry has an added tag 'sent from my Blackberry',[5] Beth received additional cues about the context surrounding her ex-lover as he was communicating with her about the dissolution of their relationship. And she was offended because he was not treating communication with her as private or significant enough and he was using a work-related device to communicate what she would like to be a most personal and thoughtful ending.[6] While the people I interviewed understandably did not use the term metapragmatics, this was often the focus of my interviewees' analysis when they describe how communication technologies are enabling Americans to draw boundaries between what is professional and what is personal, what is public and what is private.

As Americans begin to negotiate explicitly with the ways new technologies alter how communication is made public or private, often ideas of how a public is constituted will also begin to change. In *Publics and Counterpublics*, Warner (2002) describes how one perspective on publics emerged as a historically contingent concept in which stranger-sociality and anonymity are key elements.[7] Yet the structures of technology that Americans are using now for uttering public speech are significantly different than the historical examples Warner draws upon for his argument. These new structures enable Americans to believe they have a certain degree of control or insight into who is part of the public they address, whether or not this belief is warranted in practice. These beliefs are encouraged partially by many social media sites' interfaces, because the structures of social media sites request that users monitor the boundaries of their publics, consciously selecting members of their network by ongoing friending and defriending.

Publics and access

As American undergraduates use these technologies, they increasingly think about publics in terms of accessibility, while previously the publics Warner describes were

constituted in part by assumptions of the anonymity of participants. In one of my interviews, Amelie described succinctly how people's ideas about what counts as the public imagined in one's public address can be multiple and contradictory. We were discussing when she might bring up information she learned on Facebook in an in-person conversation, and she explained that she never would.

> You don't want to hear that people are looking at your business even though it's weird because you make it public. So it shouldn't be all that weird to find out that people see it, but it is. I think when people think of public, they mostly just think of their circle of friends and maybe some of their friends' friends. But people don't really realize how *public* public is. So I think that is why it is so weird to find out that a stranger has seen this stuff.

Amelie is describing this new understanding of public speech in the context of her responsibilities as a member of a public structured along the lines of imagined access. She cannot bring herself to openly acknowledge that she is the unanticipated stranger in someone else's public in her face-to-face conversations with that person.[8]

Elsewhere, I suggest that five aspects of the publics Warner delineates change when publics are defined in terms of access instead of anonymity, including accompanying notions of responsibility as members of publics (Gershon, 2010). First, part of people's participation in such a public involves monitoring the boundaries of that particular public, managing or actively imagining who exactly might participate. People often imagine their audience as existing on a continuum from barely known acquaintance to friend, although sometimes they will insist that only people they know well are part of their publics. Second, when anonymity is no longer cloaking one's participation, it becomes far more important that everyone within one's social circle participate in a particular network. Groups of friends will often create social media profiles for those friends who refuse to use a particular medium because otherwise these non-user friends are tacitly excluded from offline social interactions. In short, people not only actively police the boundaries of publics, they also insist on certain inclusions, regardless of whether someone wants to use that specific medium in the first place. Third, Americans often find it socially complicated to address publics they perceive as internally divided. That is, a networked public might in practice include groups that offline are kept separate – friends, family, employers, and co-workers are not always allowed the same access to one's utterances offline (see boyd, 2010). Social networking sites often make this into a dilemma people actively must address.[9] Fourth, when anonymity no longer shields members of a public, these members have increasingly more responsibilities in responding to utterances. Finally, as people's ideas of publics increasingly become structured along lines of access, so too do their ideas of intimate or private interaction. A quick indication that this transformation is occurring is the number of people who told me that sharing passwords was a new gesture of intimacy, that they would share their passwords with their lovers or best friends as markers of

their closeness. A focus on access draws people's attention to the specific and varied sets of alliances that comprise the publics in which they participate.

In *Publics and Counterpublics* (2002), Warner's account of how publics operate is not medium-specific or even very medium-sensitive, although he does focus on texts, loosely defined.[10] While Warner in this later work does not focus as much on people's media ideologies about the technological structures, this is a shift from his earlier more historically grounded analysis. In *Letters of the Republic* (1990), his book on publics during the US revolutionary period, Warner argues that people's media ideologies about newspapers had to shift in order for a democratic public in the newly formed American republic to be imaginable. It was not enough for newspapers to be widely available. Initially, audiences thought only the sermons and the conversations following sermons were appropriate forums for discussing different political ideas – newspapers were not. People had to begin thinking about newspapers and pamphlets differently, and to value the anonymity that printed material was seen to allow. For early American colonists, anonymity had not previously been an important component of public printed debates, this valuation had to become commonplace before newspapers and pamphlets could become widely regarded as useful media for creating appropriate forums for democratic publics.

Anonymity is central to the addressivity of any utterance in Warner's public, and this addressivity presupposed both strangerhood and unmarked interchangeability in its listeners. As a consequence, utterances in a public were understood to have a double addressivity – speaking both to the specific person hearing the utterance at the same time as speaking to a generalized and ill-defined public.

> Public speech can have great urgency and intimate import. Yet we know that it was addressed not exactly to us, but to the stranger we were until the moment we happened to be addressed by it. . . . To inhabit public discourse is to perform this transition continually, and to some extent it remains present to consciousness. Public speech must be taken in two ways: as addressed to us and as addressed to strangers. (Warner, 2002: 77)

Because of this form of double address, publics are foundationally supposed to be a collection of strangers who are defined by anonymity, not their contextually-specific subject positions.

Yet publics based on anonymity are no longer the primary widespread form of public that Americans engage with nowadays. Currently people also participate in publics in which the address is understood to be directed both to a specific person and to a selected group, in which the category of stranger is no longer the most salient for understanding the double address of public speech. Those I interviewed are beginning to think of publics in terms of who explicitly has access to a particular public. Access is not a new issue for scholars studying publics. In the past, some people were tacitly excluded from certain publics because they were illiterate, not familiar with a given public's register, or too poor to be able to participate in a public with boundaries predicated on cost (see Briggs and Mantini-Briggs, 2004).

Warner acknowledges this, but claims that people participating in publics can not be explicitly aware of this and participate in a public. I argue this social imagination is changing: the undergraduates I interviewed have a different notion of publics based on accessibility. The two perspectives on publics co-exist, defining each other and occasionally clashing.

This is not a change brought about by technological structures, or not entirely so. Design features can encourage a certain form of awareness, but it is possible to use these sites without this awareness. Facebook and other social networking sites require that one accepts people into one's network. This part of the interface certainly explicitly requests that people have a level of awareness about who is in their networked public. In my own research, this awareness was heightened in part because of Facebook's regular changes to its privacy settings, which also strongly encouraged people to be aware of what others could see on their profile, and what they could not.[11]

While Facebook and other social media sites encourage a particular form of awareness, even blogs – whose interface does not encourage an explicit awareness of who one's readers are – have users who think about publics in terms of access and not anonymity. In his book *The Peep Diaries*, Hal Niedzviecki tells a story about Padme, an Alaskan housewife whose blog attracted millions of readers. It wasn't her detailed account of her children's birthday parties or her grocery shopping that fostered such interest, it was the interspersed frank details about her S/M relationship with her husband that drew readers. This was a blog whose interface did not disclose to Padme who exactly her readers might be. Technically, she was writing to an anonymous audience. Yet when she discussed her possible readers, her analysis presumed that her audience would behave as though her public was defined by access. When Niedzviecki asked her if she was concerned that acquaintances might read her blog, she

> agrees that a surfeit of details in the blog would easily allow her to be identified even by people who only know her casually. Still, I can tell she doesn't really think that will ever happen. Even if you came across the blog, she muses, would you really go around telling people about it? After all, you'd have to explain how you found it and what you were doing there. The embarrassment defense is convincing to Padme. She'll keep things separate and no one will know, and everything will be fine. (Niedzviecki, 2009: 25)

She saw her public as made responsible through embarrassment, willing to police their own responses in order to avoid socially awkward encounters. I found in my interviews that what Padme assumes is also how my interviewees understood public speech. Those I spoke with often believe that members of a public will experience certain obligations in managing information, and as a result will act responsibly. At the same time, they imagine that they can anticipate who might read their material, and that certain people will willingly choose not to participate in that particular public. This is an imagination of a public that is based

on a reflexive focus on access, not Warner's historically situated account of a public comprised of anonymous strangers.

Travelling between access and anonymity

These two different imaginations of publics clash enough in practice to have inspired certain internet users – self-identified as trolls – to adopt pedagogical projects in which they instruct others about how to use the internet as liberal subjects.[12] Clashes over what counts as an appropriate imagination of a public have created a level of awareness that is embodied in trolls, who act as meta-monitors and tricksters advocating for publics based on anonymity. Trolls are most well known as people who play pranks and post inflammatory statements online; they are less well known for the recent spate of political activism, first against Scientology and subsequently against a wide range of actors deemed by trolls to hinder free speech (including governments oppressing the Arab Spring and Wikileaks). Here I am influenced by Gabriella Coleman's ethnography with multiple groups, some tellingly named Anonymous, in which she argues that hackers and trolls are operating along classic liberal principles and critiquing a neoliberal world (Coleman, 2011). Trolling, as she describes it, 'often consists of an unpredictable combination of the following: telephone pranking, having many unpaid pizzas sent to the target's home, DDoSing, and most especially, splattering personal information, preferably humiliating, all over the Internet' (Coleman, 2011). In pulling these pranks, trolls are critiquing those people who refuse to see public speech on the internet as governed by classic liberal principles of free speech and anonymity. In Warner's account, public utterance is always partially addressed to the liberal stranger, a form of address that internet trolls will voice a nostalgia for when they seek to educate others on the internet into adopting what they consider an appropriate detached relationship to web-based utterances. In their conjoined language and media ideologies, trolls maintain that the internet is not a space for people likely to take words or the internet personally. Take, for instance, the case of Jason Fortuny. In a 2008 *New York Times* magazine article on trolls, Matthias Schwartz reported on the logic of Jason Fortuny, a self-identified troll: 'The willingness of trolling ''victims'' to be hurt by words, he argued, makes them complicit, and trolling will end as soon as we all get over it.' Schwartz went on to quote Fortuny openly imagining himself as participating in a pedagogical project. Fortuny claimed that his perspective 'allows me to find people who do stupid things and turn them around'. From Fortuny's perspective, people on the internet misunderstand fundamental aspects of how the internet functions –that is, they have the wrong media ideology. His pranks, and trolls' pranks in general, serve to instruct others about the right relationship to mediated words in a public. Trolls self-consciously decide to embody the risk that a public sphere can represent when one refuses to engage in the public sphere as a liberal stranger. They are speaking from the position of liberal subjects critiquing people who aren't anonymous strangers when speaking publicly.

Is there a sense in which the public speech acts that trolls criticize are in dialogue with a neoliberal logic? Once one begins to see a public as a network of alliances, these publics can easily be framed in terms of some of the leitmotifs of neoliberalism, and in particular, anxieties about appropriate allocations of risk and responsibility. I have argued elsewhere that neoliberalism requires a different kind of subjectivity than liberal capitalism requires, a subjectivity where the self has a reflexive managerial distance to oneself. Under liberal capitalism, one owns oneself as though one's self was landed property such that one can rent one's capacities in the marketplace through wage labor (see MacPherson, 1962). Under neoliberalism, the self is metaphorically a business and practically a compilation of skills and alliances that must continually be managed and enhanced using a market-specific logic (see Gershon, 2011a). When one manages oneself according to a market rationality, one then begins to assess one's alliances in terms of risk, reward, and responsibility. Relationships of all kinds under neoliberalism are of mixed value – while often providing resources and enhancing the self, they are also risky. I should note that risk is not an unqualified danger from a neoliberal perspective. Rather, risk provides opportunities for success; it is a requisite part of a neoliberal engagement with future possibilities (see Maurer, 1999; O'Malley, 1996). In terms of a public, alliances are essential for a public to exist in the first place, and yet alliances are also the source of knowledge circulation that becomes a problem through unwelcome revelation or other interactions with detrimental social consequences.

Public speech and other risks

The stories of public speech gone viral are only one form of risk people recount when they insist that technology is structuring communication in new ways. Another way that alliances are risky is that the responsibility one has as a member of a social networking public is not always apparent, and this ambiguity exists on many fronts. When someone sees information by being part of someone's Facebook public, is one obligated to respond? And if so, in what medium? And how does one initiate a conversation that doesn't offend? Rachel reported how insulted she was by many people's attempts to contact her after she changed her relationship status on Facebook.

> Rachel: When I took my relationship status off, I put 'I don't want to f–ing talk about it. Don't f–ing ask me.' So I get a lot of 'hey, I was just thinking of you'. And I am like 'yeah, I'm sure. Four of you just so happened to be thinking of me today, right now. I'm sure.' I got messages from people who were like 'I know you really don't want to talk about it, but you know, if you want to talk.' Of course, it was my one friend who just got out of a four year relationship. . . . And then I got some people, I was so mad, like my best friend from 8th grade: 'heyyy, how are you??' Some girl I took a class with last year who I haven't talked to in nine months 'Heyyy, whassup?' Don't talk to me.

Rachel outlines the ambivalence she felt towards being contacted. Some contacts she found acceptable, others she found nosey and intrusive. Others I interviewed said they could feel obligated to contact someone who announced a break-up but were uncertain how best to go about doing so. After all, how one's efforts will be received is unpredictable, and one might always provoke an embittered response.

Sometimes accidental revelations can lead to social dilemmas that involve the whole family. One woman I spoke with explained that her nuclear family had recently learned that they were not as close to another family as they previously thought. She believed that she was Facebook friends with her cousin, who had recently become engaged. She found out about the engagement – or, more precisely, about the engagement party – because she was friends with her cousin's fiancée. Her cousin had defriended her prior to the engagement party to prevent her from finding out through Facebook that she was not invited to the party (admittedly, she was in Indiana and her cousin was in London). Her cousin's fiancée posted photographs of the party, which she saw through her newsfeed. She wondered why she was only getting these photographs through his Facebook profile and, upon checking, discovered that her cousin had indeed defriended her. Knowledge leaks out in these ways,[13] making Facebook friendships the source of information that can potentially spark conflict, whether or not one has tried to anticipate such a scenario by defriending.

Publics are risky not only because of accidental revelation and ambiguous obligation, but also because these publics based on access are adjacent to and are always potentially able to intersect with a public sphere based on anonymity where information can circulate in openly uncontrolled and unexpected ways. People who engage in publics as though they were built on access are aware that there are other types of publics out there. From the perspective of an access-based public, a public based on anonymity is one that inevitably contains risk. Anonymity is, in these moments, seen as cloaking behavior, allowing people to behave as irresponsibly as they might wish. After all, people in an anonymity-based public do not envision that they are participating in a network in which risk, reward and responsibility must be actively balanced and managed by all participants. Sadie explained this perception when she discussed her own internal debate about whether to adopt the honesty box, a Facebook application that allows people to send anonymous messages to a Facebook profile that adopts this application:

> Sadie: The honesty box, even though I thought about using that with a friend, but I actually found the thought that it was anonymous very unsettling. Because it is counter to so much of Facebook, and that is part of the reason that people use Facebook, I think, because it is not anonymous. Because even if you don't, like the really dumb and/or malicious people think that what they do do don't have consequences, but if you are smart, you know. Like people still make mistakes, like freshman especially, like freshman and sophomores, underage kids . . . not the best judgment, but still part of you knows that other people will see it at the very least.

> At the very least, even if you don't care, you know someone will see it. So the thought that people could say anything they wanted about you and you didn't know who they were, I find it skeevy. I mean it is one thing on Myspace and the communities I read, mainly the tattoo community . . . people say nasty things to each other. But that is more anonymous than on Facebook.

Here Sadie offers a fairly typical account of anonymity as hazardous, as creating great possibilities for hostile speech, speech that she also depicts as irresponsible. Anonymity, according to her media ideology, subverts accountability. Here is an instance in which familiar categories, such as anonymity, are being re-imagined because of a new conception of publics combined with people's media ideologies of specific technological structures.

Pushing send

I have examined moments that publics are interwoven, and how American undergraduates perceive forms of address that circulate between differently structured publics. This occurs in US contexts in which people are actively concerned with the 'newness' of new technologies. Journalists and those I interviewed are constantly critiquing others' uses of media as though there was a widespread etiquette, which one learns does not in fact exist when one studies people's disparate media ideologies and practices. These narratives also reveal tensions between an emerging understanding of publics that coheres around a concept of access and an older understanding of publics as requiring address to anonymous strangers. Speaking in public now sometimes means explicitly addressing a bounded network limited by accessibility, and may no longer be an address determined by anonymity and ever-expanding circulation. And if one thinks in terms of a public based on access, then the public sphere looks like a network of very risky speech and anonymity a cover for antagonism.

Neoliberal logics have encouraged people to frame the contrast between access and anonymity in terms of risks. This occurs in the context of neoliberal discourses that frame ideal alliances as ones in which risk and responsibility are equitably distributed based on a market logic (Gershon, 2010). In this article, I have been focusing on one possible risk – the speech acts that leap between a public imagined in terms of access to a larger one imagined as a public sphere. Risk, however, is not simply about a movement of information away from a public controlled by access. And here I want to defend the perspective of those I interviewed and suggest the common media stories about the hazards of 'pushing send' contribute to a neoliberal logic. These narratives of viral messages are neoliberal because risk is maximally linked to the behavior of individuals, and agency is located only with the putative speaker. They overlook how statements are de-contextualized, circulated through other people's actions, and aided by the embedded social narratives present in a technology's materiality. The narratives also aid neoliberal logic by ignoring the infrastructures created by the long histories of corporate and government

practices. The people who push send are navigating multiple and mutually defining social imaginations about public spheres and public speech, not simply acting out of ignorance or carelessness.

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Notes

1. For a comprehensive overview of ethnographic literature on publics see Cody (2011).
2. For a summary of neoliberal subjectivity see Gershon (2011a).
3. I discuss the differences between analyzing the textual traces of a break-up versus interviewing in Gershon (2012).
4. Metapragmatics here specifically refers to the information that guides addressees on how to parse the contexts and putative authorial intentions that prompted that particular utterance. Metapragmatics is more generally used by linguistic anthropologists to describe the elements of language used to orient audiences towards what an utterance is accomplishing.
5. Beth explained in the interview that this tag could not be erased by the user at the time.
6. I have pointed out elsewhere that many of the break-up stories I collected focused with dismay on the medium or words used in the break-up conversations. It is possible that even if he hadn't used a Blackberry there would be some other aspect of the break-up conversation that would have bothered Beth, beyond the fact that being dumped is quite often unpleasant.
7. Counter to Warner's own claims in *Publics and Counterpublics*, and in response to various editors' perceptive comments, I am arguing that the views of publics discussed in this article are historically and culturally specific and, while widespread, still one of many possible vantage points on public speech Americans can inhabit at any given historical moment.
8. Readers familiar with Irvine's complex re-working of Goffman's analysis of footing will recognize Amelie's conundrum as one based on occupying a participant role unanticipated by the speaker but sanctioned and even encouraged by Facebook's interface (Irvine, 1996). To express part of my argument in terms of participant roles, a view of publics based on access, conjoined with people's media ideologies of the structures of new technologies, also entails a different range of possible participant roles and their attendant responsibilities than a public presuming anonymity of addressees.
9. Since I did my research, Facebook and other social network sites have created interfaces that allow people more control in differentiating recipients and thus sending messages to designated audiences.
10. His account suggests publics are not comprised of co-present audiences.

11. There are also viral stories that circulate occasionally about what Facebook does with users' information and what fixes people can use, which Jane Goodman pointed out to me.
12. I want to thank Paul Manning for the conversation that led to this paragraph.
13. Although the bride was inaccessible because of ethnographic constraints, one can't help noticing that she was primarily concerned about how information spread on Facebook but did not seem to be as cautious about other channels. My thanks to Debra Vidali for pointing this out.

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